

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 AID-05 INT-05 AGR-05 EB-07 IGA-02 COME-00  
ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-01 INR-07 L-03  
NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06  
EUR-12 IO-13 TRSE-00 /105 W  
-----080646Z 109498 /16

R 080345Z JUN 77  
FM AMCONSUL SHIRAZ  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0146  
INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 SHIRAZ 0092

E.O.11652: GDS  
TAGS: PFOR, IR, AF  
SUBJ: THE HELMAND WATERS

REF: (A) KABUL 0654, (B) TEHRAN 2901, (C) KABUL 1282

1. I VISITED ZAHEDAN AND ZABOL MAY 13, 14, AND 15, PRIMARILY TO LOOK INTO THE HELMAND WATERS ISSUE FROM THE LOCAL LEVEL. I TALKED WITH A NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN BOTH PLACES AND MEMCONS OF THE MOST RELEVANT CONVERSATIONS ARE BEING POUCHED. THERE FOLLOWS A COMPENDIUM OF THE INFORMATION OBTAINED.

2. FIRST, A FEW FACTS CONCERNING THE PHYSICAL SITUATION IN SISTAN, THE AREA IN IRAN WATERY THE HELMAND:  
--THE REGION IS DRYING UP. RECENT ARCHEOLOGICAL EXCAVATIONS IN SISTAN INDICATE THAT THE WATER TABLE HAS FALLEN ABOUT 20 METERS IN THE LAST 5,000 YEARS.  
--ALMOST NONE OF THE WATER WHICH FLOW INTO THE HAMUN (THE SYSTEM OF SHALLOW LAKES WHICH STRADDLES THE IRAN-AFGHAN BORDER THERE) RISES ON THE IRANIAN SIDE. AMBASSADOR DA-VOUDI'S STATEMENT (PARA 9 REF A) IS PATENTLY FALSE.  
--SISTAN IS A RELATIVELY REPEAT RELATIVELY FERTILE AREA IN AN OTHERWISE EXTREMELY ARID REGION. ON THE AVER-  
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AGE, SISTAN GETS ABOUT 30 MILLILITERS OF PRECIPITATION ANNUALLY, AND EVEN WITH IRRIGATION THE AVERAGE YIELD OF WHEAT PER HECTARE IS ONLY 1.5 TONS, SOMEWHAT BELOW THE IRANIAN NATIONAL AVERAGE FOR IRRIGATED WHEAT WHICH ITSELF IS NOT PARTICULARLY HIGH.  
--THE HELMAND IN SISTAN DIVIDES INTO SEVERAL DISTRIBUTARIES, SOME NATURAL AND OTHERS MAN-MADE. ONE OF THE

LATTER, WHICH LEAVES THE MAIN CHANNEL ABOUT TWO KILOMETERS ABOVE KOHAK AND FLOWS IN A NORTHWESTERLY DIRECTION, FORMS PART OF THE BORDER BETWEEN AFGHANISTAN AND IRAN.

--THE DAM AT KOHAK (AND ANOTHER AT ZAHAK ABOUT 15 KILOMETERS DOWNSTREAM) IS IN ACTUALITY A BARRAGE WHICH DIVERTS WATER FROM THE HELMAND'S MAIN DISTRIBUTARY IN IRAN INTO AN IRRIGATION CHANNEL. AS THE BARRAGES HAVE NO STORAGE CAPACITY BEHIND THEM, THEIR VALUE FOR FLOOD CONTROL IS NEGLIGIBLE.

--THE IRRIGATION CHANNEL CARRYING WATER DIVERTED BY THE BARRAGE AT KOHAK PARALLELS THE DISTRIBUTARY MENTIONED ABOVE WHICH FORMS PART OF THE IRAN-AFGHAN BORDER AND ULTIMATELY DEBOUCHES INTO THE HAMUN. IT IS THEREFORE EXTREMELY UNLIKELY THAT THE DAMAGE INFLICTED ON 100,000 AFGHAN HECTARES FIFTEEN YEARS AGO BY FLOOD WATERS WAS AS A CONSEQUENCE OF THE BARRAGE AT KOHAK AS CLAIMED BY ABDULLAH (PARA 2 REF A).

-- THE IRANIANS CURRENTLY HAVE 74 LARGE PUMPS IN OPERATION ON THE HELMAND, MOST OF WHICH ARE DRAWING WATER OUT OF THE SAME DISTRIBUTARY WHICH FORMS PART OF THE IRAN-AFGHAN BORDER. SOURCES ON THE IRANIAN SIDE STATED THE AFGHANS HAVE NONE.

3. THE ECONOMIC SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HELMAND'S WATERS FOR IRAN DIMINISHES THE FURTHER ONE TRAVELS FROM SISTAN. IN ZAHEDAN, THE PROVINCIAL CAPITAL, THE GOVERNOR GENERAL (HIMSELF AN AGRICULTURAL ENGINEER) TENDED TO TAKE A RELATIVELY RELAXED VIEW. AS FAR AS HE WAS CONCERNED, THE MOST IMPORTANT ISSUE IS STABILIZATION OF THE WATER  
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SUPPLY. HE THINKS IN TERMS OF THE POTENTIAL FOR AGRO-BUSINESSES IN SISTAN WHICH WOULD REQUIRE SUBSTANTIAL CAPITAL INVESTMENT. SUCH INVESTMENT CANNOT BE UNDERTAKEN IN A CLIMATE OF UNCERTAINTY.

4. IN ZABOL, ON THE OTHER HAND, ECONOMIC CONSIDERATIONS EXCLUDE ALL OTHERS. WITHOUT THE HELMAND'S WATER SISTAN HAS NO FUTURE AT ALL. THERE IS UNANIMOUS AGREEMENT THAT IRAN NEEDS ALL THE WATER IT CAN GET AND WIDESPREAD BELIEF THAT 26 METERS PER SECOND IS GROSSLY INADEQUATE. THERE IS A FACTUAL BASIS FOR THE LATTER, AT LEAST IF

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EUR-12 IO-13 TRSE-00 /105 W  
-----080646Z 109511 /16

R 080345Z JUN 77  
FM AMCONSUL SHIRAZ  
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 0147  
INFO AMEMBASSY KABUL

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 SHIRAZ 0092

SISTAN'S FUTURE IS GAGED IN TERMS OF CURRENT LAND USAGE AND PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY. AT PRESENT, APPROXIMATELY HALF OF THE REGION'S 200,000 ARABLE HECTARES ARE CULTIVATED DURING A GIVEN YEAR. ALMOST ALL THE LAND IS PLANTED IN CEREALS. IF IRAN'S SHARE OF THE HELMAND'S WATERS IS LIMITED TO 809,000,000 CUBIC METERS PER YEAR, EVEN IF IT COULD ALL BE USED TO MAXIMUM EFFICIENCY, IT WOULD NOT BE ENOUGH TO IRRIGATE ADEQUATELY 100,000 HECTARES OF WHEAT AND BARLEY.

5. BUT THERE ARE ALTERNATIVES. CONVERTING THE AREA TO PASTURAGE WOULD REDUCE THE PER HECTAR REQUIREMENT FOR WATER. A CERTAIN AMOUNT OF GRAIN PRODUCTION WOULD BE LOST THEREBY, BUT EVEN NOW SISTAN'S PRODUCTIVE CAPACITY IS ONLY OF LOCAL IMPORTANCE (NO MORE THAN 2.5 PERCENT OF IRAN'S TOTAL WHEAT PRODUCTION COMES FROM THE REGION). MOREOVER, DEMOGRAPHIC TRENDS, IRRESPECTIVE OF THE AVAILABILITY OF WATER, ARE HASTENING THE DAY WHEN A MAJOR SHIFT IN THE CHARACTER OF AGRICULTURE IN SISTAN WILL BECOME INEVITABLE. EVEN NOW, MIGRATION OF THE REGION'S YOUNG MEN TO OTHER PARTS OF IRAN IN SEARCH OF ECONOMIC OPPORTUNITY AND THE PERSISTENCE OF THE TRADITIONAL FARMING TECHNIQUES HAVE RESULTED IN LESS LAND BEING CULTIVATED  
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THAN COULD BE PUT INTO PRODUCTION GIVEN (FOR THE MOMENT) THE RELATIVE ABUNDANCE OF WATER AVAILABLE. THE AGRICULTURAL OFFICER IN ZABOL BELIEVES THAT THE SCARCITY OF LABOR WILL SOON MAKE A TRANSITION FROM CEREALS TO ANIMAL HUSBANDRY MANDATORY.

6. POLITICALLY, THE HELMAND'S WATERS HAVE IMPORTANT

DOMESTIC AS WELL AS INTERNATIONAL IMPLICATIONS. (AS FAR AS THE LATTER ARE CONCERNED, I FOUND UNIVERSAL CONVICTION AT THE LOCAL LEVEL THAT THE SOVIETS HAVE PUT AFGHANISTAN UP TO CONSTRUCTION OF THE KAMAL KHAN DAM AS A MEANS OF ATTACKING IRAN ON AN EXPOSED FLANK.) OF NECESSITY, TEHRAN MUST BE CONCERNED ABOUT THE ECONOMIC WELL-BEING OF CITIZENS IN ONE OF THE REMOTEST AND POOREST REGIONS OF THE COUNTRY. THUS, AS SUGGESTED BY AMBASSADOR MAHMUD-GHAZI (PARA 2 REF B), RATIFICATION OF THE HELMAND WATERS TREATY MAY NOT ENTIRELY PACIFY THE GOI SINCE IT WILL DO NOTHING TO RELIEVE (AND MAY EVEN EXACERBATE) LOCAL CONCERNS IN SISTAN.

7. GHAS'S HYPOTHESIS (PARA 4 REF C) REGARDING IRANIAN MACHINATIONS HAS A CERTAIN PLAUSIBILITY, ALTHOUGH GIVEN SISTAN'S DECLINING AGRICULTURAL IMPORTANCE AND THE DEMOGRAPHIC PATTERN THERE (IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE POPULATION HAS ACTUALLY DECLINED ALTHOUGH THE MOST RECENT CENSUS INDICATED A VERY SLIGHT INCREASE OVER THE LAST TWO DECADES), I AM INCLINED TO THINK A VARIANT OF IT MIGHT HAVE GREATER VALIDITY: IRAN NEEDS (AND IS PRESENTLY USING) MORE WATER THAN IT IS ENTITLED TO UNDER THE TERMS OF THE TREATY DURING THE PERIOD OF TIME REQUIRED FOR TRANSITION FROM CEREAL CULTIVATION BY TRADITIONAL METHODS TO SOMETHING ELSE REQUIRING BOTH LESS WATER AND LESS LABOR. HENCE THE DESIRE TO BUY WATER EXCESS TO AFGHANISTAN'S OWN NEEDS AS REPORTED IN PARA 2 OF REF C. FOR THE SAME REASON, IRAN IS PARTICULARLY UPSET BY THE KAMAL KHAN PROJECT WHICH FROM ITS POINT OF VIEW SMACKS OF A

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## Message Attributes

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**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
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**Review Markings:**  
Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
22 May 2009  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 22 May 2009